

# Caution: Raunchfest makes sides ache right off the 'Bat'

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"In a cave many miles to the south / Lived a boy born with fangs in his mouth . . . "

If you're not sure whether to see *Bat Boy: The Musical*, the rock-and-roll romp inspired by bogus stories in the *Weekly World News*, consider carefully your reaction to the following: Best. Stuffed-animal orgy. Ever.

An off-Broadway hit in 2001, *Bat Boy* isn't for everyone. It's a sort of fairy tale, but one that's bloody, raunchy and wildly over the top. It's also biting funny - a silly satire with a sing-along score and a serious message.

This cult hit is having its Arizona premiere with Nearly Naked Theatre (yes, there is some partial nudity). It's a low-tech production on a small stage, but Damon Dering's creative direction is another example of why his company is the leading alternative troupe in the Valley.

It would be a shame to spoil the surprises - just be prepared for an aching gut from laughing. And don't be afraid if you're not a fan of musicals. *Bat Boy* is both an homage and a send-up of the genre, accessible to serious and casual theatergoers alike.

New York actor Jimmy Hays Nelson has the lead role as a freakish half-breed who spends half of the show leaping around on all fours, then pulls off a *Pygmalion*-like transformation in his quest for acceptance in small-town West Virginia. It's a grueling role, but Nelson brings out both the humor the pathos of his character.

The supporting cast is also strong. Not all of the singing and dancing is up to New York standards, but in a spoofy show like this, that hardly matters. Athena Hunting is particularly good as Meredith Parker, the prudish matron who takes the Bat Boy into her home. Playing daughter Shelley Parker, Amanda Kuchinski has the prettiest voice in the cast, while Damon Bolling sends the music to new heights of craziness as a histrionic tent preacher.

Finally, Brad Rupp is a riot switching between the characters of Rick Taylor, the leather-jacketed tough, and church lady Lorraine. There are multiple-role castings; in most shows, this would be artfully concealed, but in this one, it's just more fodder for comedy.

"Love me, Bat Boy / Save me, Bat Boy / Sink your fangs into my soul . . . "

How can you resist?